Reconciliation

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Introduction

We will follow 2 Corinthians 5:11-21 and it says God is now reconciling the world to Himself in Christ. It declares that God, in Christ, is reconciling the world to Himself. In practice, God did not impute their sins to the world. Here we find the word “reconciliation” used twice. First it speaks of God reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, and then of the word of reconciliation (that is, the preaching of this truth). Moreover, verse 19 also says, “not imputing their trespasses unto them.” The striking thing is that this idea—that God does not impute sins—is often translated in our English versions with the word for reconciliation. If you did the same here in verse 19, the concept of reconciliation would appear even three times in this single verse. Yet these are two distinct biblical concepts. They are of course related, but they are genuinely two different things. We shall return to this when we treat the subject of “reconciliation.”

Reconciliation with God

In the New Testament we read about reconciliation with God. By faith we have become partakers of this reconciliation. That means we are reconciled to God. This does not alter the fact that this is a different biblical truth from the one connected with the so-called Great Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). On the Day of Atonement (the atoning work of the high priest) the focus is not on reconciliation with God, but on the atonement of sins—in practice, the putting away of sins. The other concept of reconciliation, which occurs far more frequently in the New Testament, has nothing to do with sins but with the position of man. They are truly two different matters, but the problem is that both are usually translated into English with the same words. In practice it is relatively easy to see in a English translation which of the two is meant. When it says that “our sins are reconciled,” it means our sins have been “put far away” (according to the Greek) or “covered” (according to the Hebrew). But when it says that we “are reconciled to God,” another party is involved. That means we have entered into a different (and far better) relationship with God.

2 Corinthians 5:11-21 speaks of reconciliation with God! That is the meaning of the expression “reconciling” or “reconciliation.” It concerns the fact that man has come into a different, better—yes, a new—relationship with God. In practice this is the most important truth in the Bible. This new relationship has been brought about by the death and resurrection of Christ. From our side it has been brought about by the new birth. By natural birth we stand in a certain relationship to certain people. By the new birth we enter a different relationship with God and with our surroundings. Otherwise the new birth would have no purpose. That is the very heart of our salvation.

It is remarkable how often these concepts are confused. In my view far too much emphasis is often placed on the idea of reconciliation (covering) of

sins in the sense of the Day of Atonement. Sadly, many people think they are saved on the basis that their sins have been covered (put away). This is a misunderstanding. No one is saved by the reconciliation (atonement) of sins. We have not been saved by the reconciliation of our sins, but by reconciliation with God—that is, by coming to stand in a different, better, higher, unbreakable and inviolable relationship with God. We are reconciled to God if we have been born again. You will see clearly that this latter concept of reconciliation is in practice synonymous with the new birth. The new birth is the "process" by which this reconciliation with God is accomplished.

This important truth is set out here in 2 Corinthians 5. It is drawn more or less from Romans 5, where exactly the same things are in view. In 2 Corinthians 5 it is stated concisely and in black and white, giving us real clarity.

2 Corinthians 5:11

"Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men…"

"We" here refers first of all to Paul and Timothy, the writers of this letter. Paul and Timothy persuade men to faith by words—namely by the "word of reconciliation," as it is later called in 2 Corinthians 5:19. This concerns reconciliation with God, the new birth, the different relationship, the change in man's position (the position of the believer). It is striking that Paul here gives as his motive for preaching the gospel that he "knows the terror of the Lord." In modern English "terror" may sound exaggerated, but it means the apostle is conscious that he will one day have to appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

In 2 Corinthians 5:10 Paul says: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." Verse 11 continues: "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." In 1 Corinthians 4:1-2 the apostle puts it this way: "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." If it never comes up anywhere whether those stewards have been faithful, that means nothing. Paul explains in 2 Corinthians 5 how it is. We must all be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ, and he, as a steward of the mysteries of God, will have to give account of what he has done. Stewardship speaks of the grace-gifts received from God. At the judgment seat it will become clear what one has done with those gifts—whether one has carried the responsibility as a servant in the service of the Lord or as a priest of the new covenant after the order of Melchizedek. Paul says he is conscious of the "terror of the Lord," and that the judgment at the judgment seat is his chief motivation. In this way he defends himself to the Corinthians. It was well known that the Corinthians wanted to listen to everyone except the apostle Paul. Paul makes it clear that they will nevertheless have to listen to him, because he simply has to declare the Word of the Lord. He will not cease to do so, even if no one wants to listen. The most important thing is that the Word should be spoken, not whether anyone listens. That was Paul's responsibility before the Lord.

Making a Choice

The goal of preaching is to bring people to faith. God waits for the moment when we will believe. God expects us to open our hearts so that the Word of God may be written in them. You do not receive faith passively. We ourselves must open the door of our heart (Revelation 3:20) or, with meekness, allow the Word to be planted in us (James 1:21).

Paul is engaged in preaching the word of reconciliation in the hope and expectation that there will be people who will listen to that word. If the Word is not proclaimed, no one can listen and no one can come to faith. Romans 10:14 asks: “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?” Paul was sent to preach. Where the Word sounds, there is opportunity for the hearers to receive that Word and come to faith. That is the responsibility of man himself—not the responsibility of God. God’s responsibility is to make His Word known. For that purpose He sends some to preach that Word. Those some are expected to be found faithful.

Coming to faith is man’s own responsibility. Man can choose what he will believe and what he will not believe. Man himself decides which philosophy or teaching he accepts or rejects. In fact, man is choosing all his life long.

The preaching of the gospel would be pointless if God had to give faith. On the contrary, 2 Corinthians 5:20 says: “We pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.” Here we find a plea from Christ—indeed from God Himself—to man, urging him to believe. That is very different from man praying to God, “Lord, please give me the gift of faith.” That is foolishness and contrary to the whole of Scripture. Scripture is full of preaching and calls from God to mankind in general, to Israel in particular, and here in the second epistle to the Corinthians to believers, urging them to open their hearts to that Word so that God can do His work in the believer. That is the purpose of the preaching of the Word of God. “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.” Preaching is not the setting out of interesting stories, philosophies or the like. Preaching is a call to faith in the Word that is spoken.

From 2 Corinthians 5:11b-13 follows a longer section in which the apostle again defends himself to the Corinthians. This happens regularly in the letters to the Corinthians. “We are made manifest unto God” means that God is fully aware of Paul’s intentions and work. The Corinthians are not aware, but that is precisely why Paul continues his work.

> 2 Corinthians 5:14
>
> “For the love of Christ constraineth us…”

This is another motive of Paul and Timothy. The first motive was “knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.” The main thought continues in verse 14: “the love of Christ constraineth us.” The love of Christ is the expression of the bond that exists between Paul and Christ, and vice versa. Paul realises that he will soon stand literally before the judgment seat of Christ. He will stand before the One who loves him and whom he loves. Paul cannot afford to let the preaching of the Word drift,

even though people did not want to listen and were so difficult. Paul says the love of Christ constrains him. He wants to stand pure before that Lord by whom he has been redeemed. Therefore, in spite of everything, he persuades men to faith.

Why men must come to faith is explained in the next verse:

> 2 Corinthians 5:15
> "And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again."

Paul judges that One died for all. Many draw the conclusion that if One died for all, then all are saved. That is not what it says, but that is what people read into it. They think it is generally known that we are saved because the Lord Jesus died for us. The question then is: "Why must one come to faith?" If you say, "Only if one believes is one saved," then I reply, "Then Christ evidently did not die for all, but only for believers." It seems a difficult problem, yet it really is not.

The misunderstanding is that we are not saved because the Lord Jesus died for us. We have not been saved by the death of the Lord Jesus. The reverse is true: if He had not died for us, we could not possibly be saved in any way. But the fact that He has died for us does not automatically mean that we are saved by that. That is only part of the truth. The death of the Lord Jesus does not in itself produce salvation. It involves a judgment upon the sinner in general, upon sin (singular) and also upon sins (plural). The point is that the Lord suffered and died for us—in other words, He bore the guilt of sin—so that the sinner's account has been settled. The balance is back at zero. Zero is certainly not salvation.

It says: "If one died for all, then were all dead." It does not say: "If one died for all, then were all saved." The biblical thought is that we are saved by His resurrection from the dead. I have nowhere read that that is for all. I have read that He died for all, but I have never read that He lives for all. There lies the whole difference.

The story is that the Lord Jesus suffered and died for all, and that He lives for those who believe—and in that order. The sinner must first get rid of his sins. That means his sins receive righteous retribution. But we are not there yet. For when the sins have received righteous retribution, the sins are gone, but the sinner is not. Then the sinner himself (the source of all misery) must be put away. When the sinner is put away, he is not saved and is no longer a sinner either. The sinner has then been definitively lost. He has disappeared (been put away). The perishing of a sinner can never be the goal of the death of the Lord Jesus. A sinner would disappear anyway, because he does not have life in himself. The result of the working of sin in the sinner is, after all, death.

> Romans 6:23
> "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Through the death of the Lord Jesus an official judgment has been pronounced upon humanity—and indeed upon the whole creation. This includes the sinner. It is in perfect harmony with the law and confirms the law (Romans 3:31). By this judgment upon the old creation, the account of

the old creation has been brought to zero. If the sinner who has been put away by that judgment is nevertheless to be saved, then that sinner must rise again from the dead. He must receive new life after death. In that way he becomes a partaker of a new creation. This can only happen once the account of the old creation (the old man) has first been paid in full. That is why God Himself paid that account! In this way a foundation has been laid upon which the new creation could come into being. We are saved by Him who, after He had suffered and died for our sins, rose again from the dead. Whether we become partakers of that new creation and of salvation (blessedness, deliverance, reconciliation) depends on the choice we make. We are given a life here on earth in order to make that decision. It is wisest to make that decision as quickly as possible. In this old world we are in any case given the opportunity and the possibility—even after the death of the Lord Jesus—to choose life (Deuteronomy 30:19b).

New Life

The aim of preaching is to move people to faith, so that by faith they might become partakers of the resurrection of Christ. In general Paul says in verse 15: “We thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead.” That is the background to his preaching and to his thinking. It is a negative truth. It means that judgment has come upon all men. It means that God regards every person as already judged, because One came into judgment on behalf of all. Jesus Christ stood in our place. Humanity is dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1). That has certainly been the case since the death of the Lord Jesus. From that background Paul preaches new life to all who are dead before God and who find themselves under judgment. What else can you offer a dead person but life? The preaching of the gospel is not the preaching of a dead Saviour, but the preaching of new life out of death. The glad tidings are never the message of someone’s death, but of victory over death. This is the only true glad tidings: that there is resurrection from the dead. This message is preached to those who before God have long since been judged and are therefore dead. The reason why the Lord died for all is given in the second half of 2 Corinthians 5:15.

> 2 Corinthians 5:15
> “And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.”

All have died. How then can it suddenly speak of “they which live”? Are these people an exception to “all”? They are those who, after that death, have received new life. Christ died for all, without exception. Yet there are those who live. These have received life out of death. How? By faith in this glad message, that is, in the word of reconciliation. “They which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again!” He died for all. Here people are mentioned who nevertheless live. The Lord died for them and rose again. If these people live, it is because they have become partakers of the resurrection of Christ. These are expressly not all, but some. He died for all, and He was moreover raised for those who believe. That is why it says, “we persuade

men” to faith—so that they might not only partake of the death of the Lord Jesus, but that they might partake of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When someone comes to faith he must not say, “Now I know that the Lord died for me.” That was already true before. He should rather say, “I have come to faith, and since then I know that the Lord lives for me, having risen from the dead.” The Lord lives as the Firstfruits of a new creation and in a new creation. The life one receives in Christ is therefore the life of a new creation, not of the old. In that new creation righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13) and sin no longer reigns (Romans 6:14). The purpose is that believers should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. It sounds a little strange here, but the gospel as such is not being expounded in these verses, let alone preached. The apostle is speaking about his own position, because it had been called into question and attacked by the Corinthians. The apostle says he is occupied with his ministry because he bears that responsibility. The idea is that “they which live” (2 Corinthians 5:15) are at any rate Paul and Timothy. It ought to have been the Corinthians, but they understood nothing of it. Paul is therefore saying: “So that we should no longer live unto ourselves, but unto Him who died for us two and rose again. Because we are actually doing that, we are writing you this weighty and powerful letter” (see 2 Corinthians 10:10). That is why everything is phrased in this way.

The general truth is that the Lord died for all, and that those who believe subsequently partake of His resurrection and thereby of a new creation. The purpose is that they should now no longer live for themselves according to the old man (under the power of sin), but for Him who died for them and rose again. In short, that in that new creation and under the new covenant they should serve the Lord, their Creator. We may assume that when someone comes to faith he has come to the understanding that a creature is expected first and foremost to serve his Creator. We may also assume that such a person has understood that he cannot do this by nature, because by nature he is unfortunately a sinner. When God then delivers such a person from sins and makes him a new creature in whom sin is not, it automatically means that we may expect a believer now to live to the honour and glory of Him who has delivered him from death.

It is therefore black and white. One died for all. No one is an exception. That is why we can preach the gospel to everyone, because it is for everyone. When people come with the story that God must give faith or that God must draw a person to faith because He has already decided who will and who will not, it shows that they do not distinguish between God’s foreknowledge and God’s will. God desires that all men should be saved (1 Timothy 2:4), but God’s foreknowledge tells us that only a remnant will be saved (Romans 11:5). It is not, however, a question of God’s election. God has not predetermined who He will and will not take. That cannot be, for there are many texts which state that with God there is no respect of persons, or words to the same effect. Salvation is for everyone! God did not give the disciples a list of the names of the elect so that they would at least know to whom they should preach the gospel. No, it was not like that. They were to preach the gospel to everyone—to the whole world and

to all nations—so that the responsibility would lie not with God, but with all those nations and all those people. What God had to do and could do, He has done for all men. Therefore we as servants of the Lord may bring the gospel to every person, because the gospel is for everyone. Jesus Christ died for everyone, but a person is saved only by faith in Him whom God raised from the dead. By faith in the Living One one becomes a partaker of the life of that Living One. It is as simple as that.2.

High Priest of the New Covenant

2 Corinthians 5:16

“Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.”

Here we see the consequences of verse 15. Paul says that he and Timothy, for the reason given in verse 15 (One died and therefore all died), know no man after the flesh. It is glaringly obvious that the Corinthians do know people after the flesh. He even says, “though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.” Christ after the flesh is called Jesus. We know Christ the Risen One, seated at the right hand of God. He is the same as Jesus. We know Him not so much as the man before His suffering and death, but as the One who was raised from the dead and has become the Firstfruits of them that slept, the Heir of the whole creation, and the Head of the Church—namely, the High Priest of the New Covenant. After the resurrection we are dealing with things that had no bearing on Christ before He died. Before His resurrection Christ was not the Firstfruits of a new creation, nor the Head of the Church. In Hebrews 7:14-22 we read that the Lord would not have been a priest or high priest on earth, because He sprang not from Levi but from Judah. Christ is now, on the basis of His resurrection from the dead, High Priest (Hebrews 5:5). We know that Jesus who was taken from among men and appointed for men in things pertaining to God (Hebrews 5:1). We then promptly know Him as Christ Jesus our Lord.

In Corinth, after Paul, other apostles had also preached. Afterwards the Corinthians said, “I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas” (1 Corinthians 1:12). There were also people who had known the Lord Jesus after the flesh—for example Peter (Cephas). Paul says that although he himself had not known Jesus after the flesh, there were those who had. They should not boast about that. One should not glory in the flesh, but in the Spirit (1 Corinthians 1:31). It is not about the One who suffered and died, but about the One who since then, and on that basis, has been highly exalted (Philippians 2:6-10). The exaltation is the result, and that is what counts.

> 2 Corinthians 5:17
>
> “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

Both verse 16 and verse 17 begin with “So then” (or “Therefore”). Both verses follow on from verse 15. When someone is in Christ (in the One who died and rose), he or she is a new creature (a new creation): old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. The question

is not whether you can check that, but whether you believe it. God sees us as a new creation. He sees us at any rate as having died, but then, on the ground of faith, raised in a new creation with the life of a new creation. A believer has been raised or made alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:5). That is reconciliation in the sense that one has been brought into a different (far better) relationship with God. In this the position of man has been completely changed. This is contained in the Greek word we shall discuss later. Verse 17 speaks of this new position: the old has passed away; behold, all things are become new. That is the new birth. The new birth is nothing other than death and resurrection—death in the sense of the end of the original birth in the flesh, and resurrection in the sense of being born again of the Spirit and therefore receiving life afresh. The new birth presupposes that one has been born once before, but that that life has in some way been terminated (at least judicially). Then one is born again. That birth only has meaning if through it one receives not the life of Adam, but the life of a new creation—the life of Christ. Scripture uses many different words that in practice express the same reality with slightly different shades of feeling. This concept of reconciliation (the changed relationship that has been brought about) corresponds with the new birth. The purpose of the new birth is that through it the relationship with God is changed. Whereas by natural birth one was a sinner and in some way cut off from God, by the new birth one is placed in a position in which one is joined and connected to the living God.

Reconciled by Jesus Christ

> 2 Corinthians 5:18
> "And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation."

"All things are of God" means that all these things are not of man. They do not come about by works, nor by the flesh. God has reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. I always find this a beautiful expression. Jesus is the One who died, and Christ is the One who rose from the dead. In general this is the thought, without making the names absolute. The concept of reconciliation is introduced here for the first time in this passage, but only after it has first been explained. The meaning of "reconciliation" is already clear without studying the original text. Scripture explains itself. It is clear that the death of the old man and then the birth of the new man on the ground of faith is reconciliation in the sense of the word used here. Whereas one was originally an old creation, one has become a new creation. God judged that old creation apart from us. On His own initiative He brought judgment upon humanity through the Lord Jesus Christ. Afterwards, by faith in the risen Christ, we have come into that new position—by our identification with Him, or by fellowship with Him who lives. All these things are of God, who has brought us into a better relationship with Himself by Jesus Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.

The main thought in this passage is not the exposition of what salvation or reconciliation involves. The apostle does explain it, but the main thought is still that the apostle has to defend himself before the Corinthians. Paul

says that this is the truth that matters, and that this truth has been entrusted to him. He hopes that the Corinthians will at last understand how important it is that he preaches and makes known this truth. It is a refined way of writing, but it works.
“The ministry of reconciliation” is not a ministry by which reconciliation is accomplished! There are always word-jugglers who then say that a ministry of reconciliation is a ministry to bring reconciliation about. That is not true. The ministry of reconciliation is a ministry in which that reconciliation is made known. It states that God has accomplished the reconciliation. Reconciliation does not come about through preaching. Some think that, but it is a misunderstanding. Preaching is nothing other than the proclamation of the work that God has already accomplished. The moment we come to faith we are born again, or rather reconciled to God. But strictly speaking our new birth is the new birth (death and resurrection) of Christ, not our own. When we come to faith we partake of His new birth and of His life. When we come to faith we are delivered, but that deliverance is and remains in Christ Jesus. In short, when we come to faith we partake of the deliverance that is in Christ (Romans 3:24). In this way we also partake in Him of His blessings and of His election. All these things already existed before we came to faith (in our dispensation we can put it that way). We partake of these existing things the moment we come to faith. When we come to faith, nothing is thereby accomplished. We partake of that which has already been accomplished. All these things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ. Afterwards this message (the ministry of reconciliation) is preached, in which people are called to faith. That means, therefore, that by faith man partakes of this risen Christ, of a new creation, and thus of this reconciliation.

> 2 Corinthians 5:19
> “For God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.”

This is more or less a summary of the whole passage, but again seen in the light of the apostle Paul’s ministry. “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.” The phrase “God was” means that it had already taken place in practice. God has done this in the death and resurrection of Christ. The non-imputation of sins has everything to do here with the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus. It is the way in which God accomplished reconciliation for the world. God’s work (reconciling the world) was the removal of the sins of the old creation. According to verse 21, these sins were laid upon the Lord Jesus Christ. The sins of the world were imputed to Him. He was the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world (John 1:29). He paid the debt fundamentally at the cross. Afterwards the Lord Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. In that way deliverance came, and in that way reconciliation was accomplished. That is the preaching of the gospel. We find this worked out in detail in 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul makes the gospel known. Yet 1 Corinthians 15 is not usually known as a proclamation of the gospel, but as the resurrection chapter. The gospel is therefore the resurrection of Christ—namely the new life that is in Him.

In 1 Corinthians 15:3 Paul says that the Lord Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures. In 1 Corinthians 15:4 he says that the Lord was raised the third day according to the Scriptures. The whole chapter goes on to speak about that. Paul discusses the resurrection of Christ, the new creation that came into being through it, the way in which we partake of it, the way it will have an effect in the future, the way the resurrection will affect our bodies in the future, and the rapture of the Church. “And hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.” We have now encountered the word “reconciliation” four times: twice in verse 18 and twice in verse 19. “The word of reconciliation” corresponds with “the ministry of reconciliation.” Verses 18 and 19 run completely parallel. In verse 18 it is about “us,” while in verse 19 it is “the world.” That, of course, is the difference. In this way the purpose and meaning of the ministry and the word of reconciliation are immediately explained. The ministry of reconciliation has the goal of preaching this reconciliation to those who form part of the world (who are in the world), so that they might partake of this reconciliation and thereby belong to “us.”
God has reconciled us to Himself, for God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. This also means it is intended for everyone. The preaching has the purpose of moving everyone to faith. That does not fully succeed, because only a remnant is saved. Paul brings out here that he is involved in that preaching. Paul says about his ministry:

> 2 Corinthians 5:20
> “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.”

“So” means “in this way.” Paul is, through the preaching of the word of reconciliation, an ambassador for Christ. “As though God did beseech you by us,” because God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. Therefore Paul and Timothy pray on Christ’s behalf: “Be ye reconciled to God.” First it is stated that God has accomplished everything in Christ. In the statement “be ye reconciled to God” it is clearly implied that not everyone is automatically reconciled to God, is being reconciled, or will be reconciled. One must let it happen. What that involves was already said in verse 11: “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.” In verse 20 Paul says, “Be ye reconciled to God.” How does that happen? By faith! The purpose of the preaching is that through it people are reconciled to God, or in other words, that through it they come to faith. One comes to faith and thereby partakes of the reconciliation that God has accomplished in Christ.

> 2 Corinthians 5:21
> “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

“He who knew no sin” is the Lord Jesus Christ, who by nature knew no sin. In Isaiah 53:6 we read: “…and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Jesus Christ suffered and died as a sinner for all (for the world), “that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” “Him” is the risen Christ. The expression “that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” links completely with Romans 3:21-31. There it says that the

righteousness of God has been manifested through the faith of Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all them that believe. “Righteousness” is again another term that is used. The sins (unrighteousnesses) were put away by the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus for humanity as such. But one is righteous when one is (exists). If one does not exist, one is nothing. One must first come to the life of the new creation, that is, to the new birth. Then one partakes of the righteousness of Christ.
In Romans 5:12-21 it is stated that man by nature, through birth, partakes of the unrighteousness of Adam. Through the new birth that same man partakes of the righteousness of the last Adam, Christ. Man by nature partakes of the disobedience (the unbelief) of Adam, and through the new birth man partakes of the obedience (the faith) of Christ (Galatians 2:16). In 2 Corinthians 5 the difference between the old and the new creation is also discussed. The transition from the old to the new creation (from the old to the new humanity) we call the new birth, but it can also be called reconciliation. That is reconciliation in the sense of bringing about a new and better relationship with God, or in other words, bringing about a connection from an old creation to a new creation. This thought is the foundation of our salvation. In this thought a clear black-and-white distinction is made between an old and a new creation. They have absolutely nothing to do with each other, for between them lie the three days of death and resurrection. By faith we are placed in the new creation. As an unbeliever one is also cut off from the old creation. One does not notice or know this, because one is accustomed to the circumstances. Humanity and the old world have in principle already been judged and cut off from God for 2000 years—certainly since the rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Placed in the Light
Through the preaching one is placed in the light of the new life and is delivered from the darkness in which one actually lives (Colossians 1:13). The darkness of the world is the darkness of death. In the preaching the great difference between light and darkness (life and death) should come clearly to the fore. Hebrews 4:12 says: “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit.” Soul in general is the old creation and spirit the new creation. The Word makes the distinction between soul and spirit. The question is not: “How much do you have of the one and how much of the other?” The basic question is: “Which side are you on? Do you belong to an old or to a new creation?” If we have become new creatures in Christ we should live consciously out of that. We should be conscious that we have become new creatures and that we live in fellowship with and in dependence upon Christ—Christ who is our High Priest after the order of Melchizedek and who makes reconciliation for the sins of His people (Hebrews 2:17). This concept of reconciliation is not the same concept as in 2 Corinthians 5. We shall discuss that in the continuation of the study.

- Katallassoo

The verb “to reconcile” in the sense of bringing about a better relationship is in Greek katallassoo. Katallassoo is derived from the Greek verb allassoo, which means to change completely. It can also mean to replace, that is, to put something else in the place of the one. When part of the whole changes, it is also called changing. When there are no limiting expressions and no limiting context, changing always means that the whole is replaced. Allassoo is never translated with “reconcile” but always with “change.” Allassoo with kata (shortened to “kat”) in front of it has no other meaning. The verb katallassoo has a different function and is therefore translated with “reconcile.” Kata means “down.” Translating katallassoo as “to change down” is nonsense. We can, however, explain what it means. Allassoo is a change and kata means downward. Katallassoo therefore expresses that something is put in another place, or that something is given another position. That is also how katallassoo has been translated. Reconciliation has the function that one takes another position in relation to another party. When we are reconciled to God, the Greek verb katallassoo is used. That means that in relation to God we have come to another place and into a better position. First we occupy a position in the old creation—that is, in darkness. Through reconciliation we have been placed somewhere else, namely in a new creation. First there is enmity, and in reconciliation the parties come to each other. Katallassoo is translated with “reconcile” because we have no other Dutch (or English) word for it. Three hundred and fifty years ago the word “reconcile” was chosen for the translation of katallassoo because that is what it means. That is why in most commentaries, also in languages other than Dutch, the concept is explained. It is added that although two parties are reconciled with each other, that does not mean that both parties take another place in relation to each other. It means that only one party takes another place. God is not reconciled to the world, but the world is reconciled to God! The world stood hostile toward God, but God did not stand hostile toward the world. For in John 3:16 it says: “For God so loved the world!” The world was an enemy of God. We—the world, so to speak—are reconciled to God. That is at any rate the intention. For God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. That means that the sinner (now limited to man) is the party that has come into another position. That is the real fundamental meaning of the concept katallassoo.

- Allassoo

The verb allassoo occurs six times in the New Testament.

> Acts 6:14
> “For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.”
> Romans 1:23
> “And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.”
> 1 Corinthians 15:51
> “Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.”

1 Corinthians 15:52
“In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”
Galatians 4:20
“I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you.”
Hebrews 1:12
“And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.”

- Katallassoo

The verb katallassoo occurs six times in the New Testament.

Romans 5:10 (twice)
“For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.”
1 Corinthians 7:11
“And if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife.”
2 Corinthians 5:18-20 (three times) [as quoted above]

- Katallagē

The noun katallagē (reconciliation) occurs four times. This word has the same meaning as the verb katallassoo, namely to have come into another and better position in relation to God.

Romans 5:11
“And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.”
Romans 11:15
“For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?”

2 Corinthians 5:18 and 5:19 [as quoted above]There is also the verb apokatallassoo in Greek. “Apo” means “from somewhere.” We say “from.” The preposition “apo” does not change the meaning of the verb katallassoo. It still concerns coming into another position. It concerns restoration. “Apo” in the sense of “from” means that the cause of the whole lies somewhere else. It comes from somewhere. In English this cannot be captured in one word. Apokatallassoo says that that change (reconciliation) of position has been accomplished. However, the party that was reconciled to God did not itself move to another position, because the cause lies elsewhere. That cause, or the One from whom the reconciliation comes, is Christ. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:19).

- Apokatallassoo

This verb occurs three times in the New Testament.

Ephesians 2:16
“And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.”
Colossians 1:20-21 (twice)
“And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled.”

In Hebrews 9:15 the Dutch has the word “reconciliation.” That, however, is a misunderstanding. There it is not the word for reconciliation but for deliverance (redemption).

Hebrews 9:15
“And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.”

It concerns here the redemption of the whole old covenant (the first testament), including all the transgressions of the old covenant (the law). When one is delivered from the law, one is automatically delivered from the transgressions. For where no law is, there is no transgression (Romans 4:15).3. Crowned with Glory and Honour

Hebrews 2:9-18
9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.
10 For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.
11 For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren,
12 Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.
13 And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given me.
14 Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;
15 And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.
16 For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham.
17 Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.
18 For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.

In this passage we first read about reconciliation in the sense we discussed in the first part of this study. When the word “reconcile” appears at the end of this section, it refers to an entirely different concept. It is the same Dutch word, but it expresses a completely different idea. In Hebrews 2:9-16 we read about what the Lord Jesus did in the past through His death and resurrection, but the word “reconcile” is not used for that. Reconciliation is mentioned only in connection with His ministry after His resurrection from the dead (Hebrews 2:17-18).
In Hebrews 2:9-16 the focus is on the Lord Jesus who suffered and died. Hebrews 2 refers back to Old Testament prophecies and statements. The most important quotation comes from Psalm 8. Psalm 8:5-7 says: “What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands…” Who or what is this man? The answer is given here in Hebrews 2. This son of man is the Lord Jesus Christ, who for a little while (a short time) was made lower than the angels. We learn of the Lord Jesus that He was in the form of God, but emptied Himself. He took the form of a servant and was made like men. And in that form He humbled Himself and became obedient (read: believing) unto death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also highly exalted Him (Philippians 2:6-9). In one stroke this tells us there was also an extreme humiliation—a humiliation to the uttermost. That is not merely “a little lower than the angels,” but as low as possible beneath the angels. The phrase “a little lower” in Psalm 8:6 and Hebrews 2:7 therefore refers to the duration of this condition: the short time the Lord was humbled beneath the angels—from His incarnation until His resurrection from the dead. God first made Him lower than the angels and then highly exalted Him and set Him at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:3). The thought is that this Son of Man, who was first extremely humbled, is the One who was raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of God. In that position He has been set over all the works of God’s hands and crowned with glory and honour.
In reality Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2 speak of the Son of Man (literally: son of Adam). This Adam is not the first but the last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45). This true Man is not the first man but the second Man. That second Man was from heaven (1 Corinthians 15:47). This Man was for a short time placed beneath the angels, but He has now been crowned with glory and honour. That this is an important truth is clear from the fact that the greater part of Hebrews 1 is occupied with the thought that Christ has been placed above the angels. For some this is self-evident; for others it is not. For the Messiah of Israel, the Son of David who was to establish His kingdom in Jerusalem, is missing from the earth. That is because He is seated at the right hand of God in heaven—a far higher place than earthly Jerusalem. The epistle to the Hebrews deals with these very matters.

> Hebrews 2:9
> “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.”

In Hebrews 2:9 we read of Jesus who is crowned with glory and honour. Jesus is the Man who was taken from among men (Hebrews 5:1) and who has for the time being been placed on the throne in heaven. Peter declared: “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). That is why we see Him crowned with glory and honour (Psalm 8:6). This corresponds exactly with 2 Corinthians 5:16: “Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.” We know Him as the One who, since His walk on earth with His disciples, has been highly exalted and is seated at the right hand of God. Hebrews 2:9 says the same as 2 Corinthians 5. It states that Jesus was for a short time placed beneath the angels in order to be able to die (because of the suffering of death). It was rightly a short time, for the Lord died after a brief life on earth. That was the purpose. The Lord was placed beneath the angels because, as Man, He had to suffer until death followed. That is the suffering of death, not merely suffering on the cross. It was suffering throughout His whole life. The Lord suffered as Man because of His faith, and He suffered unto death. It says emphatically: “… that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.” That means: “that He should die.” The clause makes clear that this was indeed for all. In other words, He died for all, and the grace of God is also for all. Through this grace sins are put away.

> Titus 2:11
> “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men.”

The saving grace of God has appeared to all men—for all people. How then can anyone speak of a limited offer of grace? In 2 Corinthians 5:15 the limitation follows immediately: the Lord died for all, that they which live should live for Him who died for them and rose again. In Titus 2:12 the limitation also follows.

> Titus 2:12
> “Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.”

The saving grace of God teaches us who believe—not all men.

> Hebrews 2:10
> “For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.”

The thought here is that these many sons who are brought unto glory are those who partake of the resurrection. He died for all, but not all enter that glory. Those who do receive that glory are these sons who are brought to glory—or to new life, or to the kingdom. These sons have a Captain. That Captain goes before them and leads them to that glory (in our mind’s eye we see the Shepherd who goes before the flock). Christ is that Captain. In Romans 5 we have the comparison between the first and the last Adam. The first Adam was a sinner. The sin and death that reigned in Adam we have all inherited. That is, the sin of Adam lives in us. Over against him stands that one other Man—the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ did not have His origin in Adam; His origin was higher than

Adam and before Adam. Jesus Christ came from heaven, yet by a miracle He became Man with human rights and responsibilities. Moreover, He was then taken from among men to be the Firstfruits of a new humanity. The old humanity lay under the curse that was borne by Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:13). Then He rose from the dead to be the Adam (the first man) of a new creation.

In the comparison of Romans 5 we see Adam at the head of the old creation together with all those who partake of Adam's life and therefore follow him because they can do no other. Over against him we see the last Adam—Christ—and all those who through the new birth have partaken of the life of Christ and follow Him because they can do no other. The new man is born of God and cannot sin, because His seed remains in him (1 John 3:9). The Life from which the believer has been begotten is in the believer. We therefore see the humanity of the old man and the humanity of the new man set over against each other. The one humanity with Adam as head, and the other humanity with Christ as Head (Ephesians 2:15). Just as Adam is the captain of the old man, so Christ is the Captain of the new man. As all die in Adam, so all shall be made alive in Christ (1 Corinthians 15:45). As by the disobedience (unbelief) of Adam many were made sinners, so by the obedience (faith) of One (Christ) many shall be made righteous (Romans 5:19).

In Hebrews 2 only the new humanity is in view. That is why Christ is called the Captain of the new humanity. Believers have received the life of Christ, just as by nature they received the life of Adam. By natural birth we are in Adam and Adam is in us. By the new birth we are in Christ and Christ is in us. Christ, the Captain of our salvation, had to be transferred through suffering and death, and then through resurrection, from the old humanity to the new humanity. By death He was loosed from the old living humanity. By death an end came to the existence of the sinful man—or to the sinful existence of man (Romans 6:6-7). That was a step in the right direction, but the goal had not yet been reached. The goal is only reached when that dead man afterwards rises from the dead in a new creation—in such a situation and with such a life that sin is no longer there and can no longer be there. That is the situation in which righteousness dwells. It was necessary that this Captain should be made perfect (sanctified, set apart) through sufferings—in practice the suffering of death. Christ would through suffering be separated from an unholy world and an unholy humanity and be made whole with a new creation and with God. This is the concept of reconciliation as we saw it in 2 Corinthians 5. Through this reconciliation the position of the old man is replaced or changed into the position of the new man. As an old man one is separated from God (dead in trespasses and sins, Ephesians 2:1) and stands guilty before God. As a new, born-again man we are for ever joined to the living God. The broken relationship under the old covenant is restored under the new covenant. That is called reconciliation (katallassoo).

The Best is Yet to Come

Hebrews 2:14

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also

himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil."
These children are the same as the children in verse 13: "Behold I and the children which God hath given me." These children are the believers (brethren) who grow from children to sons. Jesus Christ came to them in the likeness of sinful flesh (Romans 8:3). He came in the same form as a man (Philippians 2:8). Christ came as a descendant of Adam, as the Son of Man. He partook of flesh and blood, that is, of the old humanity. So that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death. It is not possible to destroy him who had the power of death by merely going into death. ("Destroy" here means "render powerless" or "make of no effect.") One would then simply be subjected to the power of death. By rising out of death He rendered powerless him who had the power of death. The power (the strength) of death is precisely that whoever falls into it does not come out again. The definition of death is "definitive separation." The power of the Lord was stronger. He rose from the dead and thereby made the power of death of no effect. The resurrection of Christ—the exit from death—is the entrance into the new creation and meanwhile the entrance into a new humanity. Through death and resurrection deliverance is accomplished. That is stated in the next verse.

> Hebrews 2:15
> "And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

"All their lifetime" means throughout their whole life. "Bondage" here is slavery to death. A man is all his life subject to the slavery of death. In practice he is always fighting against death, or against corruption in general. All the obligations a man has in life and all the things he simply must do spring from the working of death. Man has to do all kinds of things to keep what exists from falling apart. The misery is that he still cannot succeed. In this verse we read that we have been delivered from the bondage of death. I hope this is not merely a theoretical matter but also a practical reality. It means that in practice death is still inevitable, but for us believers it no longer matters so much. We know that death is not the end, yet it is not entirely the beginning of the story either. Nevertheless, the best is yet to come (Philippians 1:23). The slavery of death has been removed because Christ has rendered death powerless. The working of corruption is now far less in the life of a believer, because he has an alternative. A believer has been delivered from the fear of death, from death itself, from the slavery of death, and so on. All this took place in the past in Christ.
In Hebrews 2:9-15 we have exactly the same things as in 2 Corinthians 5, although they are quoted in a completely different context. It is stated that the old creation has passed away and that the new creation has been brought into being. In this way deliverance has been accomplished. Deliverance means that you have been set free from the old creation and placed in the liberty of the new creation. Deliverance is in practice redemption. A price has been paid by Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 6:20). We are not redeemed with silver or gold, but with the blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Peter 1:18-19). We see that

deliverance and reconciliation are in practice the same. The words have a different shade of meaning, but in essence they are identical. Other terms used in this connection in Hebrews 2 are “sanctification” (verse 11) and “glorification” (verse 10). Believers have been sanctified—that is, set apart from an unholy world, but also made whole with a new creation in which there is no sin. “Bringing many sons unto glory” (verse 10) means that believers are led to the glory of the new creation.

> Hebrews 2:17
> “Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.”

“His brethren” are the same as the sons who had to be brought unto glory (verse 10). Christ had to be made like all His brethren (among other things, partaking of flesh and blood) so that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest. The Lord Jesus was appointed High Priest after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:5-6). He is not a High Priest of the old covenant (after the order of Aaron), but He is High Priest of the new covenant. Since the old covenant has dominion over a man as long as he lives—that is, until death (Romans 7:1)—it means that when Christ is the High Priest of the new covenant, He can only be that after death. Christ became High Priest at His resurrection from the dead. Christ came under the law to redeem those who were under the law (Galatians 4:4-5). The Lord came to free them from the old creation, including the law, and to bring them into a new creation where the law is not and where one stands in liberty (Galatians 5:1). The high-priestly work of Christ has nothing to do with His suffering and death. Of course all things are connected, but when the Lord was not yet High Priest, He had no high-priestly work to perform. The Lord died under the old covenant on the basis of the old covenant and thereby fulfilled the law (Romans 8:4). He did this not as High Priest, because that was not His function.

The reconciliation we discussed in connection with 2 Corinthians 5 means that one is taken out of an old creation and placed in a new creation. In Hebrews 2:17 Christ has been taken from an old creation into a new creation, and in that new creation He has become High Priest to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. This expression causes the confusion in language! We must sense with our feet that this “reconciling” is something different from the reconciliation spoken of in 2 Corinthians 5. It is the same word in Dutch (and English), but it is a different concept. It does not mean that our sins have been brought into a better relationship with God—as if “our sins have been reconciled to God.” That cannot be! Our sins should not be in any relationship with God at all. The word “reconcile” used here is an entirely different Greek word and an entirely different biblical concept. In verse 17 it is not about a relationship being established, but about the covering—or, in other words, the putting away of something. When we cover something, we do it to put it away. We cover, for example, a pile of dust under a doormat. Covering is not something temporary. The intention is that that covering should be there for ever.

In the Old Testament the work of the high priest on the Great Day of Atonement is indicated by the word reconciliation. In Hebrew that day is called “Yom Kippur.” Kippur comes from kafar. The basic meaning of the Hebrew verb kafar (200-80-20) is “to cover.” We find this translation in Genesis 6:14, where Noah had to pitch (cover) the ark with pitch. Elsewhere in the Old Testament kafar is mostly translated “to make atonement” or “reconcile.” When the Old Testament says that someone’s sin or transgression is covered or forgiven, other Hebrew verbs are used. All these verbs are synonyms of one another. They are written differently but have the same meaning.
For example: Job 31:33; Psalm 32:1; Psalm 85:3; Isaiah 27:9; Romans 4:7-8. Other synonyms for the reconciliation (covering) of sins include: to take upon Himself (Isaiah 53:4); to cleanse (Jeremiah 33:8); to cast into the sea (Micah 7:19); to take away (Romans 11:27); not to impute (2 Corinthians 5:19); to forgive (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14); to remember no more (Hebrews 10:17); and to bear on the tree (1 Peter 2:24).The Great Day of Atonement is therefore literally “the Great Covering Day.” The derived meaning of “to cover” is “to put away.” In the Greek translation the word used for reconciliation also carries the meaning of putting away completely.

- Hileoos

The first Greek verb we discuss in this connection is hileoos, which is translated “to be merciful,” but that is a derived rendering. The basic meaning is to put far away. This verb occurs twice in the New Testament.

> Matthew 16:22
> “Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.”

Peter is not saying, “Lord, reconcile Yourself.” When we know the meaning of the Greek word for reconcile, we understand that Peter means: “Let this be far from You (put it away).” Peter did not want to hear that the Lord would suffer and be killed.

> Hebrews 8:12
> “For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.”

This verse is quoted from Jeremiah 31:34.

> Jeremiah 31:34
> “…for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

That means the Lord has put their sins far away. In practice this means that God is merciful.

- Hilaskomai

The verb “to reconcile” in the sense of putting away sins is in Greek hilaskomai. This verb is derived from hileoos. It occurs twice in the New Testament.

> Luke 18:13
> “And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his

eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner."

"Be merciful" is the translation of the Greek verb hilaskomai (to reconcile). Literally it says: "O God, reconcile me, the sinner." The thought is therefore: "O God, put my sins far away." This is not reconciliation in the sense of restoring a relationship with God, but reconciliation in the Old Testament sense of covering sins, as happened on the Great Day of Atonement.

Hebrews 2:17

"Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people."

Here the position and work of Christ as High Priest of the new covenant are described. Christ partook of flesh and blood. He died and rose from the dead. Then He was appointed High Priest. The function of the High Priest is to reconcile the sins of the people—that is, to put them far away and remember them no more. This is the work the high priest performed on the Great Day of Atonement.

- Hilasmos

The noun "reconciliation" also occurs twice in the New Testament. This is the Greek word hilasmos.

1 John 2:1-2

"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

An "advocate" is a Comforter (parakletos in Greek)—literally "one called alongside," or an advocate. That Advocate is Jesus Christ the righteous, that is, our High Priest. He is the High Priest of the new covenant who reconciles the sins of the people (believers who have sinned). "He is the propitiation" means that He reconciles. It is expressed more strongly here by using the noun instead of the verb. This is not about the changed relationship (the new birth), but about the putting away of our sins—the sins of believers. In principle Jesus Christ died for the sins of the whole world, but that is not John's subject here. We discussed that subject in 2 Corinthians 5. Here we have the same reconciliation that was accomplished in the Old Testament by the high priest once a year on the Great Day of Atonement. This reconciliation is now accomplished by the High Priest of the new covenant in heaven at the right hand of God.

1 John 4:10

"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

This is the same thought as in 1 John 2:2. Here it does not speak of the world, but only of believers. This concept of putting away sins is first and foremost connected with the present position of believers and the present position of Christ in heaven as High Priest of the new covenant. In the future, when Christ is on earth, He will also be High Priest.

- Hilasterion

The word “mercy seat” (propitiation) also occurs twice in the New Testament. This is the Greek word hilasterion.

> Romans 3:25
> “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.”

In Romans 3 the law and the inability of the law (the old covenant) are discussed. By the deeds of the law no flesh (the old man) could be justified before Him, for by the law is the knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20). Through the law there is no justification, deliverance or reconciliation. Through the law there is knowledge of sins, and therefore a burdened conscience. I always say that sinning is not so bad as long as your conscience is not burdened by it. Then we can do two things. We can sear our conscience (1 Timothy 4:2)—a painful business. Or we can have our conscience cleansed (Hebrews 9:14)—a far better way.

Now the righteousness of God has been manifested without the law (apart from the law) (Romans 3:21). The law regulated, among other things, the service in the tabernacle, the service in the temple, and the service of the high priest on the Great Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). On that day the high priest went into the sanctuary with the blood of bulls and goats and approached the ark of the covenant. In this way the mercy seat became a living mercy seat! The righteousness of God has come about through the faith of Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all them that believe. In the original text it does not say “unto all and upon all them that believe,” but “unto all them that believe”! For there is no difference (Romans 3:22). For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). And (those who believe) are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:24). When one comes to faith, one partakes of the redemption that is in Christ. God has set forth Christ Jesus to be a propitiation through faith in His blood. In Romans 3:25 hilasterion is translated “propitiation.” The correct translation of hilasterion is “mercy seat.” In Hebrews 9:5 hilasterion is rightly translated “mercy seat.”

> Hebrews 9:5
> “And over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercyseat; of which we cannot now speak particularly.”

The translation “mercy seat” confirms the thought that all the related Greek words refer to the Old Testament institution of the Great Day of Atonement. In Hebrews 9 the furniture of the tabernacle is discussed. In verse 5 the mercy seat is mentioned. The word “mercy seat” comes from the Old Testament. It is more or less a double translation of one idea. To reconcile means to cover, and a seat (lid) is also a covering. It is therefore the same thing twice. Reconciliation is covering and covering is reconciliation. The Greek word hilasterion indicates the mercy seat, but the meaning of hilasterion is “the place of reconciliation”—the place where things are put away. Where are sins put away? In the Old Testament, expressed typologically, sins are put away on the mercy seat. In reality our sins are put away in Christ. For Romans 3:24-25 states that

the redemption is in Christ Jesus, whom God has set forth to be a propitiation (a mercy seat). Deliverance and reconciliation are concepts that stand very close to each other, as we have already seen.
We have now covered all the words for reconcile and reconciliation. When we read carefully, we know in practice—even in English—which Greek word is meant. When it is about the reconciliation of sins, we know it concerns the covering of sins (hilaskomai). When it is about the reconciliation of man, it concerns bringing man into another position (katallassoo).

The Function of the High Priest, Jesus Christ
Christ is the place where sins are put away. That is a concrete reality. There is, after all, a great deal of misunderstanding about the meaning of the work of the high priest under the old covenant and therefore also about the work of the High Priest under the new covenant.
The thought is this: we are indeed reconciled to God in the sense that the broken relationship with God has been restored (that is the concept katallassoo), and we are new creatures because we have been born again. Yet we still sin. Of course our sins have been put away by the Lamb of God, and of course we received new life when we came to faith and have become a new creation in which sin does not reign and in which righteousness dwells. But “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). The point is that although we have become new creatures and do not know one another after the flesh (I hope so), and although we see one another perfect in Christ, we know of ourselves (no longer of one another) that we still have sins. What are we to do with that? We are a new creature and yet we sin! Let it be clear that it is not the new creation that sins. That cannot be! In 1 John 3:9 we read:

> 1 John 3:9
> “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.”

The only conclusion is that John teaches the same as Paul, only in different words. John teaches that we have two natures. Some people become furious when they hear that. They do not want to be called schizophrenic. Yet we do indeed have two natures. The one nature (the new) stands perfect before God; the other (the old) does not. The old nature is only a temporary matter, but during our earthly life it gets in our way. That is a problem. Because there is still sin in our life, we do not stand clean before God. Through our sins we have a burdened conscience. That is why we have a High Priest!
What the high priest under the old covenant did—namely, make reconciliation for the sins of the people—presupposes that sins were put away and remembered no more. The high priest did his work for the people and not for the whole world. That people had gone into the wilderness with this high priest. We could say: they followed Moses into the wilderness, or they followed the Lord into the wilderness. Another way of saying the same thing is: they drew near to the sanctuary and therefore followed Aaron into the wilderness. In short, the people were gathered

around the tabernacle and around the ark of the covenant (the place where the Lord dwells). Put differently, the people were gathered around the mercy seat. That people drew near to the Lord through their own high priest. That high priest represented the people before God and put their sins far away. He reconciled (covered) the sins.
Calling the reconciliation of sins “covering sins” often creates the wrong impression. When we think of covering we imagine something is laid over it for the time being and we will see later. What if the covering is removed? There are, after all, Scripture passages that speak of the removal of a covering (for example Mark 4:22). If the wrong passages are placed side by side we get a completely wrong picture of the work of the high priest. To cover (reconcile) sins is to put the sins away definitively. The sins have no more effect because our High Priest is always there!
The thought is that the high priest under the old covenant worked for the people who had been delivered from Egypt. It is the same with the High Priest of the new covenant. He also works for the people who have already been literally delivered from the old creation. That people is, to this day, the Church. Christ, our High Priest, puts away the sins of the Church. The Church consists of gathered believers, without making a distinction between the old and the new nature of the believers. The point is that as believers we simply have those sins. The High Priest, however, puts away the sins for that gathered, redeemed people. To that end one must indeed go to that High Priest (Hebrews 4:16; 10:22). When the epistle to the Hebrews literally calls us to go to the High Priest and to the throne of grace by that new and living way (Hebrews 10:20), that is in practice nothing other than a call to live by faith! The practical consequence is that Christ reconciles (covers) our sins in the reality of our daily life. That means they are still there, they remain there (that is why it is called covering), but before God they are gone because they are reconciled (covered) by Christ. From God’s side this means that our sins have been put away, rendered powerless, or removed.
This is not about the forgiveness of sins in general by which one is saved. That has long since happened. It was not accomplished by the High Priest of the new covenant, but by the Lord before He became High Priest—when He suffered and died and in that way bore the sins of the world. The reconciling work of the High Priest of the new covenant has the purpose of removing the sins that are still present in practice, so that they no longer play any significant role. For us those sins sometimes still matter, but for God they certainly do not. If we are believers we agree with God on that. That is what matters. Our present sins play no role because we have a High Priest. If that were not so, our sins would continue to matter right up to the day of our death or the day of the rapture of the Church. Then we would always be stumbling over one another and always have things to accuse one another of, if only because God would have much to accuse us of.
In practice there are people who do not know this High Priest. They say to you and to me: “How can you, as a child of God… and you ought to… etc.” They are all accusations that plunge us into misery. In this way we believers would in this life be worse off than unbelievers. For we would still

be sinners exactly like those unbelievers. The only difference would be that unbelievers are still allowed to sin while we as believers are no longer allowed to.

The offering on the Great Day of Atonement consisted, among other things, of two goats (Leviticus 16:7-22). These two goats were regarded as one. One goat was killed. The blood of this goat was sprinkled by the High Priest on the mercy seat (Leviticus 16:15). Through this blood the new and living (blood-stained) way was made that goes through the veil into the holy of holies. The holy of holies is a picture of heaven (Hebrews 9:24). The other goat was led outside the camp and sent away into the wilderness (Leviticus 16:22). This goat is called the scapegoat and is not counted. This means that only what goes in to God is counted. That is the new man. The old man is not counted and is not reckoned to the camp. There are still more aspects to this offering, but we shall not go into them now. The point is that the offering of the two goats is one and the same offering.

It is the same with us. As to the old man we are in the wilderness outside the camp. God does not count that old man because He has put him away. Nevertheless we (our new man) draw near to God in heaven on that new and living way and stand perfect before Him. This offering of the goats describes the work of the High Priest who represents the people before God. Through the High Priest we go to God. We go as we are—sinful as we are—but before God we stand clean. As believers we have part in Christ. God sees us in Christ. When God sees us, He sees Christ; and when we see God, we see Christ! It works both ways. The function of the living Christ at the right hand of God, especially now in our dispensation, means that through Him we stand perfect before God. This is described in various ways. One of those descriptions is that of the Great Day of Atonement. Another description we find in 1 John 2:1-2, where the Lord as Advocate (High Priest) is the propitiation for our sins.

Ephesians 5:25-27 tells us that Christ gave Himself for the Church as a husband for his wife, so that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, and that He might present her to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. He is doing this now! This is not something for the future. We do not have to wait until the future for Him to finish this work before the rapture of the Church can take place. Ephesians 5 speaks of the present situation. It speaks of His function as High Priest of the new covenant, through which we now stand before God without spot or wrinkle.

One of the most beautiful descriptions is found in John 14. There we read about the Father’s house, the way to the Father’s house, and the Lord who would go to the Father’s house.

> John 14:4-6
> “And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

This true, living Way is the same way as the new and living way of Hebrews 10:20. This is clear from the fact that this Way leads to the Father: “no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” The way in Hebrews 9:24 led into heaven. This way leads into the Father’s house—which is also heaven. If Christ is the Way, it means that here too we are speaking of the great High Priest over the house of God (Hebrews 10:21)—namely Christ as High Priest of the new covenant. The Gospel of John therefore also speaks of the High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, without using the term.

> John 14:1-4
> “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.”

The Lord’s preparation of a place is not something He does to the Father’s house, but in the Father’s house. It is not work on the Father’s house because it is not yet ready. Everything is ready in the Father’s house. The work the Lord does in the Father’s house, He does on us. In His position as High Priest, at the place of reconciliation (on the mercy seat), Christ does His work on us. He reconciles us. He presents us clean before God. In this way we are made ready for that place. Where we connect this with physical circumstances (with the flesh), it must be said that the Lord will return in the future and receive us to Himself. That does not wait until the place is prepared, but until He returns. Figuratively speaking, it should be clear that in John 14 the Lord announces that He would go to heaven. That preparation of a place means that He would become High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. That has already happened. In that position He draws us to Himself (John 12:32). We have already been drawn to Him. Ephesians 2:6 says that we have been raised up together and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. We have been delivered by Him from this present evil world (Galatians 1:4). That this will also have a physical effect in the future is perfectly clear. But that must never deny our present position. Jesus Christ now, as High Priest of the new covenant, makes reconciliation for the sins of His people—that is, for all who place themselves under that High Priest. This reconciliation has nothing to do with whether one is saved or not. It has to do with the fact that as believers we still have sins in our lives. Through Christ’s position those sins are put away. Not in the sense that they no longer exist—for they remain (that is why it is sometimes called covering). Yet before God they no longer play any significant role. Therefore our sins should no longer have any significance for us either. That is the only way to overcome sin in practice.

It is Finished

The discussion centres first of all on whether Christ is High Priest. If the Word shows that He is, then the discussion moves to the question for whom He is High Priest. Moreover, people ask what the work of the High

Priest actually consists of. The answer is that He reconciles the sins of the people. In response to that answer people then say, “But His work is finished!” Jesus Christ was on earth for the suffering of death (Hebrews 2:9). He learned obedience (faith) by the things which He suffered (Hebrews 5:8). He lived on earth as the perfect believer. When He died on the cross for all, He said, “It is finished.” Then He rose from the dead and was appointed High Priest. Was His work then finished, or did it only begin then? In one sense both are true—but how?

The Lord did not suffer and die on the cross as High Priest. He did not offer a sacrifice then. The Bible never calls the Lord’s death a sacrifice. Only when He had become High Priest did He offer a sacrifice (Hebrews 9:14). There is no text in the Bible that describes His suffering and death on the cross as a sacrifice. So when Scripture speaks of an offering that the Lord Jesus brought, it refers to the offering He brought as High Priest of the new covenant since His resurrection from the dead. It is also described as a sweet-smelling savour (Ephesians 5:2). Sweet-savour offerings are the thank-offering, the meal-offering and the burnt-offering (Leviticus 1–3). They are a picture of resurrection from the dead, of the new walk of life, and of glorification. The trespass-offering and sin-offering are a picture of the Lord’s suffering and death. They are not sweet-savour offerings (Leviticus 4 and 5).

The epistle to the Hebrews states that Christ became High Priest in His resurrection from the dead (Hebrews 5:5-10; Hebrews 7:28). According to Old Testament standards the high priest had to perform his work once. He died once for our sins (Romans 6:10), but that was not the work of the High Priest. As High Priest the Lord entered the sanctuary once (Hebrews 9:12). The sanctuary is a picture of the new covenant or of heaven. In the language of Hebrews both are the same. Entering the new covenant is entering heaven. When the High Priest enters the sanctuary he must also have something to offer (Hebrews 8:3). This is the One who has already risen from the dead—otherwise He would not be High Priest and would not need anything to offer. The blood the Lord shed on Golgotha was the blood of the old testament (the old covenant). For without shedding of blood is no remission (Hebrews 9:22). Under the old covenant blood flowed. By His crucifixion the old covenant was brought to an end. The blood of the new testament is not the life the Lord laid down, but the Life He received at His resurrection from the dead. With that Life He entered the sanctuary. When the Lord Jesus presented Himself to His disciples after rising from the dead, He had a body of flesh and bones (Luke 24:39). Blood is not mentioned there. There must be a reason for that. The fixed biblical expression is “flesh and blood” (for example Matthew 16:17; John 6:54, 56). The point in Luke 24 is precisely that this blood is not there and therefore did not go into heaven. The blood in a higher application—that is, the Life of a new creation—went into heaven.

Hebrews 9:14 says that Christ offered Himself when He entered the sanctuary. He had to have something to offer! He had to enter with blood —namely with His own blood (Hebrews 9:12). The high priest under the old covenant entered with the blood of others—the blood of bulls and goats (Hebrews 9:25). Christ’s own blood is the power of an endless life

(Hebrews 7:16). It is the Life of the High Priest, of the Risen One. That living Life Christ offered to His heavenly Father. He lives to the glory of the Father (Romans 6:4). In short, He presented His body as a living, holy, acceptable sacrifice to God (Romans 12:1). You may say that this is said in relation to us—we are to do that. That is true, but are we not to be followers of God and imitate Him (Ephesians 5:1)? The thought is that we should do what He has done. When He offered Himself, He offered His body—namely the Church (Hebrews 10:5, 10). For Christ and the Church are one. Romans 6:4 says that Christ was raised from the dead to the glory of the Father so that we also should walk in newness of life. Romans 12:1 follows on from that and says that we too should present our bodies as a living, holy, acceptable offering to God. When we do that, we do not do it in order to die. God has no interest in death or in dead people. On the contrary, the purpose is that we should first be made alive so that we, being alive, might serve God. It is about presenting ourselves 100%—not 10% (tithing)—to God. We present ourselves as a living, acceptable sacrifice to God in order to live for God, because we have risen from the dead and have been made perfect (Colossians 1:28). Only when we are perfect can we offer ourselves to the Lord, for the law states that the Lord does not accept what is imperfect (Leviticus 22:21-22). Christ, the Forerunner (Hebrews 6:20) and Head of the new humanity, offered Himself to God (Hebrews 9:14). The result is that we all, in that one offering of Christ (Hebrews 10:10), have also been offered to God and are therefore His property (1 Corinthians 6:20; Romans 6:18—servant = bondslave = someone’s property). For we partake of the Life of Christ. That is the Life Christ Himself offered—not at the cross, but at His resurrection!

Christ is the Connection

We partake of the Life of Christ, yet we still feel we are not perfect. God, however, does not look at us individually, for with God there is no respect of persons (Acts 10:34). God looks at us through the Head of the humanity of which we are a part. Our Head is Christ, and in Him there is no lack (Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18). Christ represents us before God with regard to the new creation, just as Adam represented man before God with regard to the old creation. God sees Christ, and Christ is perfect. Paul says we are complete in Christ (Colossians 2:9-10). Our relationship with the living God is fixed day by day in Christ. Christ functions in that position as our Head. We are an organic unity with Christ (Ephesians 4:15-16). Christ has been our Head for a long time, and that has its effect every day. It determines our practical situation. That reconciliation was accomplished in a once-for-all event (Hebrews 7:27; Hebrews 9:12, 28; Hebrews 10:10). Since then our position before God is no longer a question of where we stand, but of the active fellowship between God and us. It is about the functioning of the connection, not the connection itself. It is about the connection working and being used. Christ is the connection (reconciliation) between God and man. How it came about and when does not matter. What matters is the practical effect in our lives now—especially in the days when our sins still play a role.

We have been reconciled once for all in the katallassoo sense. We have been born again once for all and have become a new creation. In this way our salvation is secure. That is a static matter. The concept hilasterion has to do with the practical situation—namely that sin is still present in our lives in general. Of course we can say with Paul that it is no longer we who do it, but sin that dwells in us (Romans 7:20). So sin dwells in us and still plays a role in our lives. We know that even without the Bible telling us. God does not see our sins, because they are covered by Christ, our reconciliation. That is His attitude toward us. In Him God sees us perfect and says, “Those sins are not there.” What does Christ do about it at that moment? Nothing. He is there. He stands in that position. Does Christ then not function? Yes, He does. He functions because God sees us in Christ. He is the Firstfruits of a new humanity (1 Corinthians 15:23). To this day that means nothing other than that He is the Head of the Church (Colossians 1:18).

When we say the same thing with expressions drawn from biblical pictures, it is simply that God sees us in our High Priest. We do not have to use that term if we do not want to—but then we would have to skip the epistle to the Hebrews. The thought remains the same. Christ as our Head, as the last Adam, as Head of a new humanity, is by definition High Priest of the new covenant. He will always remain so (Hebrews 7:17).

Why do we need a High Priest if we are already reconciled to God? Because we are only perfect and a new creation because of that High Priest. We would not be if our High Priest were not there! In that position Christ continues to function always. We cannot reason backwards: “Now we are here and no longer need Him.” Normally the head of the family becomes the high priest. If that family is humanity, then the man with the oldest rights—Adam—becomes high priest. That is the normal course of events. The one with the birthright—the firstborn—becomes the high priest. The last Adam, the Son of Man, became Head of the new humanity —namely High Priest. You may object and say, “I believe the expression ‘High Priest’ should not be connected with the Church.” In that case the epistle to the Hebrews and Psalm 110 would have to be removed from your Bible. That would be a pity, because through typology these Church truths are set out in the simplest way—pictorially and illustratively. It remains difficult to give shape to these abstract, invisible things. People like to have something to look at—a picture or a blackboard. What is more beautiful than using the Old Testament pictures that many of us already carry in our minds because we know the stories? That is the background of the epistle to the Hebrews. This letter does not set out a truth that stands by itself. That cannot be, because the epistle to the Hebrews bases everything it teaches on Old Testament institutions under which we do not live and which no longer apply. That is even what the epistle to the Hebrews is about. In other words, the truth of the epistle to the Hebrews is not that Christ is our High Priest, but that Christ is the Representative of the whole new humanity. God sees that new humanity in Christ. Through Christ we draw near to God, and in Him we are perfect. That is stated in the epistle to the Colossians, and the epistle to the Hebrews teaches the same thing.

The epistle to the Hebrews teaches it through the best-known Old Testament institutions. The offerings could not take away sins. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins on the Great Day of Atonement (Hebrews 10:4). Why then were those offerings there? They were a shadow of good things to come (Hebrews 10:1). They were a picture of the new covenant. The high priest Aaron, for example, is a type of Christ. Just as the high priest entered the sanctuary once a year, so the High Priest of the new covenant entered once into the true sanctuary—namely into the new covenant, or into heaven. The high priest of the old covenant did not enter without blood, and neither did the High Priest of the new covenant. He entered with His own blood (Hebrews 9:12). The high priest of the old covenant entered with perishable blood, but the High Priest of the new covenant entered with better (incorruptible) blood (Hebrews 12:24). He offered a better sacrifice (Hebrews 9:23). He is the Mediator of a better covenant (Hebrews 8:6).

That does not mean that Christ is our High Priest in the absolute sense. It means that the high priest as we know him from the old covenant is a type of Christ.

Reasoning backwards (and that is exactly what the epistle to the Hebrews does), we say that Christ is now our High Priest of the new covenant. He is not that because the epistle to the Hebrews teaches it in so many words, or because it is some isolated absolute truth, but because it is a description of the absolute truth. That absolute truth is that Christ is the Mediator, the Head, the Firstfruits, the Captain, the Firstborn of that new creation. The Old Testament high priest is the picture of this reality. You will not find the term “High Priest” in any other book of the Bible. Not because it is unimportant. It is astonishingly important! That is why you can find the truth concerning the High Priest of the new covenant in all the New Testament books, only expressed in different terms. Yet there is nothing more beautiful than the Old Testament symbolism in which the present position of Christ is described.

The communication between God and us runs through Christ. That is not easy to picture. We can imagine, for example, that the Lord speaks to us through Christ and we speak to the Lord through Christ. In that sense Christ would be like a telephone exchange that is very busy. That sounds banal, but it is still a helpful picture. Christ, however, is not busy with it. It is not so much the work He now does for us, but the position He occupies. Did the high priest under the old covenant have a busy schedule? No, because he only worked on one day of the year. Typologically this means that Christ performed His work as High Priest on one single day. That was on the day of His resurrection. Then He entered the true sanctuary with His own blood (Hebrews 9:11-12).

Everything Comes to Us through Christ

Do we nevertheless need a High Priest? Has not everything already happened? Yes, we do, because when He entered the true sanctuary (heaven) He took the position that enables us to come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16). It is through the position Christ now occupies that

we are saved and that we live day by day. The Lord is not busy with it, but He occupies the place at the right hand of God by which we are reconciled to God. He is the Mediator between God and men. When we approach God with our sinful lives, we approach through Christ (our filter). Christ only needs to be there. He does not need to do anything else. Christ is and remains the Firstfruits of the new creation on the basis of the once-for-all reconciliation (katallassoo). That better position was established once for all. In that better position He is our reconciliation (hilasterion), that is, our place of reconciliation. Communication with God in the new creation always runs through Christ. For He is a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:6). We do not stand independently before God. Our independence in relation to God is always dependent on Christ. All communication, all life, everything we need from God comes to us through Christ. Everything that comes to us comes through Christ, and everything that goes from us goes through Christ. He is the guarantee that nothing can ever go wrong. We cannot have a better picture than that. He remains for ever the Head of the Church. He remains for ever the Firstborn Son. He therefore remains for ever the High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. He remains who He is. He remains the Captain and Finisher of faith (Hebrews 12:2). He remains our example (1 Peter 2:21). He remains the author of our salvation (Hebrews 5:9). This is the content of the concept “High Priest.”

The high priest under the old covenant was not busy. That does not alter the fact that his responsibility was very great, because the whole service and all the institutions of the old covenant fell under the responsibility of the high priest. It concerns responsibility for the work, not the intensity of the work. Under the new covenant it is exactly the same. All matters concerning the service of God run through Christ. When we say that He is our Head, our Captain and the Lord of our life, that means He is the High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. By using that expression we make a comparison between the Old Testament institutions (which we are expected to know) and the New Testament position of Christ. The first is a picture of the latter. You cannot understand the latter if you do not understand the first. The point is that our living fellowship with the Lord really does run through Christ. He is our Advocate (1 John 2:1). He is in heaven to pray for us (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25) and to appear in the presence of God for us (Hebrews 9:24). The expression “prays for us” can give the impression that the Lord is very busy putting in a good word for us with the heavenly Father. That again is a misunderstanding. Christ occupies the position of Advocate (literally: lawyer). Someone can have a lawyer on retainer without that lawyer having full-time work. People with a permanent accountant, for example, only speak to him once a year. That Christ prays and pleads for us (these are synonyms) means that He looks after our affairs with the Father. Is there much to look after? Perhaps not, yet in reality everything. It all depends on how we look at it.

The greatest misunderstanding is the idea that the high-priesthood of Christ means that He accomplishes katallassoo (reconciliation with God). People think that once one is saved the High Priest is no longer needed. That is not the case. He is not the High Priest of an old creation so that the

new creation might come into being, nor of a sinner so that that sinner might be saved, nor of a slave so that he might be delivered. Christ is the High Priest of the new man (the believer, the born-again one) so that nothing can go wrong with that believer who belongs to the people of God. Christ stands between man and God (1 Timothy 2:5). He is the Mediator. The fact that the Lord is our Advocate gives the impression that there is a continuous court session in heaven where our cases must be defended. That is apparently because accusations are brought against us. We know from Scripture the accuser of our brethren, that is, Satan (Revelation 12:10). Satan does not bring accusations against the old creation—that is God Himself. Satan accuses the brethren (the redeemed). After the rapture of the Church Satan will be cast down from heaven to earth. Suppose there were an official court case in heaven because Satan had found something against us and had lodged a complaint with God. Our case would then be handled by Christ. How long would that case last? It would take no time at all. For our names are all written under the name of Christ, and Christ is perfect (Hebrews 12:23). The fact that we stand written under the name of Christ is precisely the content of the concept that Christ is our High Priest, our Advocate and our Mediator. Through Christ all accusations against us come to nothing.
The position of Christ in our days is not described as the One who works to defend us and to excuse our failures. He takes care of the communication between God and us. Christ takes care of the life of God toward us, that is, of our fellowship with God. Our reconciliation with God was accomplished by Him.

The Foot-Washing
It is perfectly clear that these two concepts of reconciliation resemble each other. Yet they are fundamentally different. They are as different as the two words for washing in the story of the foot-washing in John 13. The foot-washing took place expressly after the disciples had first been completely cleansed. The disciples were wholly clean (John 13:10). They were already saved, that is, born again (katallassoo). Nevertheless the Lord washed (niptoo = partial washing) their feet (hilaskomai). We can ask again: “Were they not already saved? Why then did they still need a High Priest?” In the Gospel of John we find the Lord Jesus exactly in the function of High Priest of the new covenant, without the word being used. That is why it does not say that the Lord washed His disciples completely (louoo). The High Priest is the One who rose from supper, laid aside His garments and girded Himself with a towel. That is a picture of the high-priesthood of Christ. Then He began to wash the feet of the disciples. The High Priest is not the One who cleanses us completely once for all, but the One who ensures that we remain clean. The complete cleansing took place in the past through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The washing of the feet is the work of the risen Christ after His resurrection for the practical life of believers.
Peter was the one who began to argue whether that foot-washing was really necessary. He therefore wondered whether he needed a High Priest. Peter thought it was not necessary. When the Lord insisted on washing his

feet, Peter wanted to be washed all over. The Lord said that was not necessary. This is exactly the question: whether we need a High Priest and what He should then do. The real answer is: We have a High Priest because God has appointed Him. God therefore considered it necessary. It is therefore sufficient that the High Priest knows what He must do. We are expected to come to Him with boldness. Then everything will be all right. He does all the rest. We must therefore acknowledge Him as our High Priest. We must believe in Him as the High Priest, even if we use another word for it. Yet everything is said at once in the term “High Priest of the new covenant.” Our High Priest is faithful to Him who appointed Him (Hebrews 3:2).

Christ is the Firstfruits of the new creation (of the new humanity). Up to now that is nothing other than the Church. The Church that is one with Christ is a church of firstfruits (firstborn ones). If the Firstfruits is High Priest, then the firstfruits are priests. That means that the epistle to the Hebrews expressly speaks about the Church—namely about believers since Christ was appointed High Priest. Believers partake of the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek. Christ and the Church, His body, are a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9), of which Christ is the Head, that is, the High Priest. The function of Christ remains always the same. As High Priest Christ did not accomplish redemption, although He did accomplish redemption. As High Priest He is the One who regulates the affairs within that new creation. In this way He is the guarantee that righteousness remains in that new creation. The High Priest of the new covenant is not called Melchizedek for nothing. Melchizedek means “King of righteousness” (Hebrews 7:2). That is the other side of the story. In this dispensation of the mystery kingdom we do not know the Lord so much as King. In the future Christ will reveal Himself as King, but even then He will remain High Priest for the believers of that time. The High Priest is therefore not the One who saves us as such, but the One who cares for the saved. He ensures that they exist as saved ones and can function (serve). Our shortcomings are now covered so that we may serve the living God.

> Hebrews 9:13-14
> “For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

Christ is the perfect sacrifice (Hebrews 10:14). He cleanses the consciences of believing people. That is the work of the High Priest. We go to the One who rose from the dead so that He may cleanse our consciences. We do not go to Him as sinners but as believers. We go to Him precisely because our conscience works so well and because we are conscious of our sins. We go to Him because we compare ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ. Because of our shortcomings we are not able to serve the living God. But when we draw near to Him, He cleanses our consciences from dead works so that we can serve the living God. Our service to God therefore comes about through Christ. In this story Christ is

not the connection between the old and the new creation, although He is that in the first place. He is here the connection between the Creator and us as new creatures. This connection always remains. This connection is the guarantee that nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:39).Here again, without using the word, it is stated that Christ is the High Priest of the new covenant. This is also stated a few verses earlier.

> Romans 8:33-34
> “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”

We should not answer verse 33. Christ, who died and rose again, is expressed in the term katallassoo. Christ, who is seated at the right hand of God and who also intercedes for us, is expressed in the term hilaskomai. He is our mercy seat (hilasterion). He puts away the sins from the reality of our lives. He ensures that those sins play no role in our lives, so that there is no break in the cable. The cable speaks of connection, of communication, and of supply. That “cable” is our High Priest, Jesus Christ!
Amen.